



Al-Risala 1986

September

2 September 1986

Editorial

The reason the Islamic message does not get across, people say, is that it is not backed up by actions. Most people can only be won over by a practical model; intellectual discussions and rational proofs are not enough. The problem is, we are not in a position to say to others: "Look, here is an Islamic individual; here an Islamic home; here an Islamic community."

At first sight this statement appears quite correct but, in fact, it is only half, not the whole, truth. Indeed the only words which have any value in the sight of God are those which are backed up by actions. From this point of view, one who preaches the message of Islam must definitely practice it. But it would be naive to think that, once his actions back up his words, people will immediately flock to him in droves.

All are agreed that every prophet was, on a practical level, an ideal individual. Seeing the prophets, and their exemplary actions, did people flock to them in a spontaneous outburst of belief? The Quran tells us that this was not the case. Most people who saw and heard the prophets disbelieved. The prophets backed up their words with righteous actions but, instead of believing, people "laughed them to scorn." (Quran, 36:30).

The truth is that it is not the practices – or malpractices – of the preacher that prevents people from accepting the truth; it is the self-interest of the listener. There is a big price tag on truth. It entails a downgrading of the self, a destruction of the ego. In single-minded devotion to truth, other objectives have to be cast to the winds. To be able to mould one's life in accordance with truth, one has to break down one's existing life-structure. Family ties, social contacts, national loyalties – all have to be made secondary to truth: it is only then that one will find it.

In reality, people are self-worshipping, that is why they do not become God-worshipping. This is the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of truth. It was for this reason that the cream of the human race – the Messengers of God – were treated with disdain and ridicule. Despite their exemplary actions, more rejected them than believed in them.

3 September 1986

When We Decree a Thing, We Need only Say: 'Be,' and it is.

(The Quran 16:40)

Until recently we had to press a switch in order to start a machine. But today a new scientific department known as Speech Technology has come into existence. This has to do with activation of mechanisms by verbal command, using no mechanical or electronic contrivances. This technology is being developed so rapidly that a regular magazine is being issued in the U.S.A. by the name of 'Speech Technology'.

Now gadgets are being made which will turn off the lights when verbally ordered and if we want to clean a room, we shall simply have to utter a few words and a robot will oblige us by activating a mechanical vacuum cleaner.

Telephones are on sale in the U.S.A. which can place calls upon verbal command. At Chicago's international airport, luggage is routed to the correct destination simply by place names being called out to a computer which, in turn, sends each piece of luggage to the appropriate container. But these machines are so costly that a common man cannot bear their expense. Only Government or industrial magnates can afford them. (This information is based on a news item in *The Times of India*, 6th September, 1985).

The Quran says that when God wants to do anything, He just says, so "be it", and it is done. Until recently, such carrying out of verbal commands seemed inexplicable to people. But now thanks to the parallel of Speech Technology this divine attribute had been made easily understandable.

3 September 1986

Fame in this world, ignominy in the next.

Muawiyah, the first Umayyad Caliph, went up to where Abdullah ibn Amir and Abdullah ibn Zubayr were sitting. Abdullah ibn Amir stood up on seeing Muawiyah, but Abdullah ibn Zubayr remained seated. "I recall these words of the Prophet," remarked Muawiyah: "'One who likes people to stand up for him might as well build for himself a home in the Fire.'"

(Al-Adab Al-Mufrid)

4 September 1986

Starting From Scratch

"I have reached my present position by climbing a ladder and not by coming up to it in a lift." This observation was made by a tailor who had started with nothing but his own two hands and the will to work, and who had become eminently successful in his line of business. "Making a good coat is not child's play. The whole process is so complicated that without detailed information as to how to proceed, long experience and a high degree of skill, it is almost impossible to accomplish. It is only after a lifetime of hard work that I have succeeded in running a prosperous shop in the city."

The tailor went on to explain how he had served his apprenticeship under the guidance of an expert tailor. Just learning the art of cutting and sewing had taken him five long years. When he opened his own little shop, he discovered that he had difficulty in giving his customers a good fitting. This was because during his apprenticeship he had never really grasped the fact that people could be of such different shapes and sizes. He therefore set himself to the task of studying human anatomy, but it was only after many years of effort that he could make a coat with an absolutely perfect fitting. He eventually became so expert in this that he could even give perfect fittings to those who unfortunately suffered from deformities – such as hunchbacks. "In any type of work, there are many things which one has to learn on one's own. Often one cannot foresee these things at the outset, and each obstacle has to be overcome by hard work and ingenuity."

The tailor talked of many things of this nature concerning his skills, and it seemed to me as though I were listening to a lecture on the building of the nation by some very experienced person.

In truth, the only way to solve our economic and social problems is to follow the example of the tailor. After this initial apprenticeship, he had gone ahead and done things on his own. He had gone up by the stairs and not by the lift. There are no buttons which you can just push and then automatically reach your goals. You can only make progress step by step. Progress can seldom be made by leaps and bounds. By means of the ladder you can progress even to the stage of owning the lift, but you cannot make a success of your life by starting with the lift and expecting it to do everything for you.

5 September 1986

The Virtue of Mercy

The famous hunter, Jim Corbett, was particularly interested in shooting tigers. To justify this cruel act, he had an explanation all ready: "I hunt tigers to protect my townsmen from man-eaters." Most hunters find some justification or the other for the cruelty of their acts. But some, like Colonel Jaipal, whose memoirs, "*The Great Hunt*", were published by Carlton Press, New York in 1982, see no need to justify themselves.

Colonel Jaipal freely admits what others fight shy of. He makes no bones about the fact that killing crocodiles gave him an intense pleasure. He would creep up on these creatures, fire at them and watch exultantly as they fled into the water where they writhed in pain, beating their tails grotesquely, and jaws agape, gasped for breath. All this gave him "quite a lot of thrills."

It is all very well to say that it is part of human nature to lie in ambush for the unwary, to plot the downfall of others and to exult in one's successes. But there is surely a better side to human nature which should be encouraged to get the upper hand of what is base and bestial in man. It is a question of recognizing this as something desirable and willing himself, by God's grace, to tread the straight and narrow path of virtue, to suppress in himself whatever is base and evil and to show mercy to all of God's living creatures. It is only if he can root out the evils of callousness and cruelty that he will prove himself of entering the gates of paradise.

William Shakespeare's lines on the subject of mercy are immortal:

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest.
It blesseth him that gives and him that take.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein both sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
An earthly power does then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

(*The Merchant of Venice.*)

Over the Edge

"A thoroughbred professional and a dashing, innovative manager with fire in his belly and ideas in his mind – an astute general." It was in such glowing terms that an official journal described the chief marketing engineer of a certain government organization – a Mr. P. V. Venkatashawaran.

On May 29, 1982, an important meeting was held in the Gopala Tower building, on the eighth floor. Mr. Venkatashawaran had obviously displayed those natural talents for which he had been so justly praised, for when the meeting was over, he emerged, flushed with the success of the decisions he had pushed through, and, talking with great enthusiasm to his colleagues, began walking briskly towards the gates of the lift. These being open and his mind still being on the happy turn of events at the meeting, he stepped over threshold of the lift without noticing that there was no lift there. He stepped straight into the empty lift shaft – the lift was still at the ninth floor – fell down eight storeys and was killed instantaneously. The irony of it was that his personal doctor had been with him at the time, but there was absolutely nothing that the doctor – or anyone else – could do for him, except declare him dead.

At the early age of 51, and, at a moment where his career had seemed at his brightest, his life had been snuffed out without warning – a unique and poignant tragedy, that is, in terms of everyday life. But from the point of view to the hereafter, the manner of dying, although extraordinary and horrifying, is irrelevant, for death, its point in time, its circumstances, accidental or otherwise, are all dependent upon God's will. What is all-important in the after life is the virtue of one's actions throughout one's life in this world.

Everyone, confident of his own wisdom and the worldly success it brings, walks straight ahead, fearlessly, paying scant attention to the fact that at any moment he may plunge headlong to his doom. Oppressing the weak and innocent, hurling insults, indulging in corrupt practices, scorning the failures of others, arguing on false premises all such reprehensible acts can plunge man into the yawning abyss of destruction – just like stepping into an empty lift shaft on the eighth floor.

Neither friends, nor any of the material attributes of his worldly successes – and certainly not wishful thinking – will save him at that particular juncture.

There is no one in this world who is not on the brink of that lift shaft. This is a point which is little understood: all are convinced that they are standing on such firm ground that there is no power in heaven or earth which will dare to touch them.

But, at any moment, at any second, they may find themselves toppling right over the edge.

7 September 1986

Problems and Opportunities

"Starve the problems, feed the opportunities": so goes an old saying. Simple words, but imbued with great profundity. One who understands their message and acts accordingly will find the doors of success opening to him, while one who lives in ignorance of them will find all doors closed to him.

The crux of the matter is that, man in this world is forever caught in between problems and opportunities. But whatever problems he has to contend with, there are always golden opportunities, not too far away, just waiting to be availed. This is true equally of individuals, communities and nations – all find themselves in the same situation.

And it is here that people are being tested in this world. One person, seeing only the problems that confront him becomes caught up in them. Such a person is bound to miss his opportunities. On the other hand, one who concentrates on using the opportunities available to him as best he can will not find much time to worry about the problems afflicting him. If one 'feeds' problems, inevitably one is going to 'starve' opportunities, while if it is opportunities one 'feeds', it will be the problems that are left 'hungry'. To make the most of opportunities, one has to make light of problems.

Experience shows that, far from helping anyone, becoming caught up in problems just leads to gloominess and depression and from the practical point of view is a waste of time. Better to concentrate on making the best use of one's opportunities. Not only will new avenues open before one, but the problems that so afflicted one will gradually pale into insignificance.

Fighting Frustration

Just a few years ago a Muslim girl of our acquaintance suffered the frustration of being denied a modern school education by an overly religious-minded father who refused to send her to a convent school. She was particularly keen on learning English, and rather than waste her time brooding over the fact that certain avenues were now closed to her, she began studying on her own. By dint of constant effort, she became proficient enough in the language to sit the matriculation examination – of course, as a private candidate. Unfortunately she failed in one subject at her first attempt, but this did not make her lose heart. It had the effect rather of making her work even harder than before and, the following year, she passed the examination with flying colours. She continued her studies in this way with whatever little help she could get in the vicinity and, after successfully passing the pre-university examination, she did her B.A. (Honours) in English and then went on to do her M.A. Still, she did not feel satisfied with her prowess, for even although she now had university degree to her credit, she had somehow not really developed her skills in writing English to any high degree. It seemed impossible to do this without the help of an able teacher, but she remembered the saying: "Where there's a will, there's a way!" And she did not lose heart. The strong and unshaken belief that God helps those who help themselves did not fail her. In the course of her struggles, she chanced upon a book published in London, which seemed to solve the problem of not being able to have a teacher. The author, an Englishman, advised foreigners who were interested in learning English to practise writing with the help of a good book, where no teacher was available. They were first to translate selected passages from the book into their own mother tongue. This book was not to be referred to again until these passages had been translated back into English by the students. Then a comparison was to be made with the original. Corrections made, and the correction committed to memory. Recognising the value of this technique, she put it into practice over a period of two years, selecting passages from books and magazines with a wide range of topics, vocabulary and styles. This approach proved so successful that she could not only handle all her correspondence independently, but could even write persuasively on topics of general interest to newspapers and magazines. Her skills also made her of great assistance to her brother in his export business.

The technique she employed is one that can be applied to the learning of any foreign language. So it is clear that there are many different avenues which can take us to the top – not just the known, the traditional and the easy-of-reach. We may find that some doors are locked along the way, but, there are always others that remain open and it is just a question of entering the right one to reach our destination. In the world of today, success lies within the grasp of those who are alert to the opportunities around them. Failure is the result not so much of a lack of opportunities but the lack of will to grasp such opportunities as exists, and to pursue one's course with determination and energy.

9 September 1986

Simply a Matter of Time

Oxford University, which was established in 1163, is surrounded by lush, green lawns. Once a visiting American millionaire, who had been quite charmed by them, asked the gardener at Oxford, how much it would cost him to have the same kind of lawns around his mansion in the U.S.A. "Nothing," replied the gardener. "How?" asked the millionaire in astonishment. "You have only to level the ground and grow the grass. Then you cut it and roll it." "Oh, really," said the millionaire, feeling reassured. But then the gardener went on in all seriousness, "Repeat this process for five hundred years and your lawn is ready." Meeting the steady gaze of the gardener, the millionaire realized that not only do the English have their own special sense of humour, but that there are things which money cannot buy.

There are things for which time is of the essence. In the evening, when the sun has set, if we have a sudden desire to see the sun again, there is no way that we can do so except wait through the long night for dawn. If we plant a seed and hope to see more than just the sapling which will spring from it, we have to wait for one hundred years, before we can see the full-grown tree, in all its might and glory.

A definite span of time has been appointed for all of nature's happenings. Nothing can come into being or fructify before that appointed time.

Learning by our Mistakes

Adam, the first man, had two sons, one of whom killed the other in anger while quarrelling. This was the first incident of the killing of a man in the human existence and the murderer had no idea of what should be done with the dead body of his brother.

"Then God sent down a raven, which dug the earth to show him how to bury the naked corpse of his brother. 'Alas'! he cried, 'have I not strength enough to do as this raven has done and so bury my brother's naked corpse?' And he repented." (The Quran 5:31).

Since this event took place, God has continuously been sending one creature after another to us to guide us as to how we should lead our lives. But man seldom takes heed of such occurrences.

A friend, by the name of Khurshid Bismal, living in Thanna Mandi, Rajouri, once showed me a spot in his house where such an incident took place as should give rise to serious thought about the quality of human endeavour. It seems that two swallows once built a nest under the eaves by bringing small quantities of mud and laboriously attaching it bit by bit to the underside of the wooden roof. It took several days of continuous effort to make the nest solid enough for them to lay their eggs in it. Sad to say, while the hatching process was going on, the nest suddenly gave way one day, fell to the ground and was destroyed. The weight of four eggs and two swallows had been too much for it. But nothing daunted, the birds began fluttering around looking for some safer place to reconstruct their home. They finally found a niche with a rougher surface, which would give the nest better support. Whereas the swallows had made their first nest just from mud, they made this one from a mixture of mud, grass and straw. This combination of materials proved much stronger than plain mud and this nest was also more firmly fixed in position than the previous one. The eggs they laid in it then were successfully hatched and this new, reinforced nest continued to provide shelter for the baby swallows until they grew up and flew away to mate and make their own homes.

There is a great lesson in this for all of us: if a bird or animal fails in some effort, it seeks to understand the reason for its failure. It does not simply give up and succumb to adversity. It casts about for some other, better way of doing things and rectifies its errors by harder work and better planning. Human beings would do well to follow this example. Our planning is so often faulty and the efforts we make so often inadequate that failures in many spheres are commonplace. But, really, all it would take to achieve success would be to give further thought to the problems besetting us and a deeper appreciation of the strategy we need to adopt. It is a wise man who learns by his own mistakes.

11 September 1986

The Need for Self-Appraisal

William Blake once said: "Great things are done when men and mountains meet. This is not done by jostling in the street."

This is quite true. It is a fact that to achieve some great goal, great acts are needed. It is only after scaling the heights of a mountain that one reaches the top. Just raising slogans or making speeches at big gatherings does not mean that any great work can be accomplished.

In order to undertake any great work and bring it to its conclusion it is necessary that we try to estimate and understand the situation thoroughly. It is necessary that we be willing to take stock of our resources and external possibilities and only then go ahead. We must fully grasp the fact that, when we begin our journey, we are going to confront many other travellers on our way.

Then we should also be willing to make every sacrifice that our cause entails; this may mean expenditure of time and money; it may mean the relinquishing of opinions or the suppression of emotions. Sometimes we have to reckon with others, and sometimes it is ourselves that we have to reckon with. There are times when we can walk and time when we can only halt in our steps.

No great goal is ever realized without facing difficulties; without surmounting great obstacles. The entire process involves a great struggle. Activity that benefits the coming generations when we have passed away; which shapes our future; which changes the course of history – demands untiring struggle and infinite wisdom. Those who think that organizing processions and raising slogans is all that is called for are grossly underestimating the importance of the task at hand. Such actions serve only to worsen the situation. They cannot produce any enduring benefit for posterity.

Showing one's Mettle

An elderly couple, B.K. Rama Reddy aged 90 and his wife, Phula Bai aged 80, were sleeping peacefully in their home at Banjara Hills, Hyderabad on the 21st September, 1981, when they were ruthlessly attacked and killed by their fifty-year-old servant, Ramaya. Now master of the house, he broke open their boxes and stole jewels worth about one lakh of rupees, then escaped into the darkness.

As he went furtively on his way, he passed by two policemen on night duty. Sensing something suspicious in his movements, they detained him for interrogation. On being threatened with dire consequences, he broke down and confessed to his crime, handing over the stolen goods to the two policemen, Sheikh Mahboob and Sheikh Rasheed. They then took him and his entire loot to the Police Station.

The Police Officers on duty greatly appreciated the honesty of these two policemen who could so easily have felt tempted to enrich themselves, in such a situation. In addition to giving them a cash reward, they also had them promoted,' Sheikh Mahboob becoming Station Officer and Sheikh Rasheed becoming Head Constable.

How opposite were the implications for different people involved in a single event! Virtue was rewarded and crime was punished. But there is nothing accidental in the one event simultaneously giving rise to such different consequences: such events are the divine instruments by which God puts different individuals to the test. Where one man would bring discredit upon himself, another man would cover himself in glory. In each case the individual concerned would reveal himself in his true colours. Where Sheikh Mahboob and Sheikh Rasheed evinced the sterling qualities of strict honesty and dedication to duty, Ramaye revealed himself for the base, unprincipled scoundrel that he was, and rightly was sentenced to life imprisonment. The world is like a divine stage where human beings are given the opportunity by God to reveal their true natures. Human calibre can be discerned all too clearly from the way people respond to different types of situations.

Yet it should be borne in mind that man has no intrinsic power. No one can, by himself, give anything to anyone, nor can he deprive anyone of anything. All human acts take place according to the will of God. Man exists in this world to be tested, and the test is as much concerned with his intentions as it is with his actions and their outcome, for man can only desire that an event should take place and strive to cause things to happen in the way he wishes but if God wills otherwise, there is no way that man can see his wishes come true. Ramaya might well have escaped under cover of darkness and enjoyed the fruits of his hideous crime, but he had failed the supreme test and God willed that his punishment should be immediate.

13 September 1986

Be Prepared

At a cost of 22 million dollars, the film on Gandhi was finally made. The director of this film, Sir Richard Attenborough, had been trying to make this film over the past twenty years, but with no success. No movie company was willing to invest in this film because it was regarded as being totally uncommercial. Yet when this film was finally made and distributed, it came to be reckoned as one of the most successful ever made. The role of Gandhiji was played by Ben Kingsley (originally called Krishna Bhanji), the son of a Gujarati doctor and an English mother. He had been engaged to play this part mainly because of his physical resemblance to Gandhiji, but it was in large measure the histrionic talent which he brought to the role which was the reason for film's phenomenal success. But it was not such a straightforward part that he could just stroll on to the sets and begin acting. It was something which he had to build himself up to psychologically. Arriving in India one month before the shooting started, "Kingsley shaved his head, started to lose 20 pounds, got very dark in the sun, memorised practically the whole of Brilley's script, began to paper the walls of his room with photographs of Gandhi, saw a five-hour documentary on the Mahatma and spent two hours a day learning Yoga and another two hours a day learning to use the spinning wheel." (*Newsweek*, 13 December, 1982).

Ben Kingsley had to play a part in a film and for this he made tremendous preparations. Only after long years of hard struggle and perseverance was it possible for him to play this part successfully. Muslims who call themselves "The best nation", "the chosen people" have to play a far more important part in human history. But can they ever succeed in playing this most difficult of roles without any preparation?

United We Stand...

Year after year, hundreds and thousands of Muslims go on pilgrimages by sea, but they have no share whatsoever in the Shipping business. Petrol is being imported into India from Arab countries in large quantities, but Muslims enjoy no place in the petroleum industry. Muslims publish innumerable books and journals, but own no paper-mills in the country.

How can this be explained? It is because major commercial and industrial enterprises, in no matter what part of the world, can come into existence only through joint stock companies or Co-operative Societies. Muslims, being in a state of disunity, cannot afford to launch themselves upon such ventures. Worse, there is no great awareness amongst them that this is a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The famous East India Company, whose activities laid the foundations of imperialism in India, was a joint stock company which was established in 1600, a great many Englishmen having invested their money in it. In 1601, its first factory was established in Surat. The Mughal rulers, on the contrary, were acquainted only with the power of the sword and knew nothing of industry. They generously allowed the East India Company to spread its tentacles in India and, within a short span of 25 years, it had established its centres in many Indian cities. Its progress was so fast that it rapidly gained control of the whole country.

Following the pattern set by the western companies, many other Indian communities followed in their footsteps and prospered to a very great extent in their joint ventures. But the Muslims of India have lagged far behind in this field. According to one estimate, about 16 percent of the population is associated with the industrial sector. But of this, the Muslim proportion represents less than even one percent. It would appear that if Muslims are hesitant to run large-scale projects, it is because any really large undertaking would require their working together in a co-ordinated fashion. And of this they do not seem to be capable.

Since commercial enterprise affects almost all spheres of human existence, the ineffectuality of Muslims in this field has led to their being forced to fall behind others in all walks of life. This has had serious repercussions which has adversely affected the general standing of Muslims in the life of the nation. Their inability to co-operate, their lack of a sense of unity, may appear to be purely subjective matters, but we should never overlook the fact that it is exactly these shortcomings which has placed success beyond the reach of vast sections of the population.

United we stand, divided we fall.

15 September 1986

Single-Mindedness

An express train hurtles towards its destination without even in the smallest degree being distracted from its course. On both sides of the track are hills and dales, rivers and fields, lush greenery, eye-catching scenes, but it skims past all of these things as if they did not matter. Peaks and valleys, meadows and lakes, tiny wayside stations do not make an atom of difference to its speed.

A purposeful life is like the career of the express train. A man who has a purpose in life devotes his whole attention to it. He does not waste a single moment of his time in walking aimlessly hither and thither, engaging himself in irrelevant problems. He is like a passenger who wants to go undeviatingly towards his destination. The attractive scenes of the world come to tempt him, but, leaving them behind, he presses on. All kinds of demanding things may block his path, but he sidesteps them so that his time is not wasted in confrontation. Irrespective of the fact that life's ups and downs run counter to his goal, his determination to proceed does not allow his speed to slacken one whit.

One who lacks a sense of direction in life rambles along aimlessly. The life of a purposeful man has, on the contrary, a definite target before him, so that there is no question of his wasting his time in allowing himself to become lost in irrelevancies. He continues in a definite direction by focussing all of his attention on his final objectives until he reaches his destination and his goal is fulfilled.

To make life meaningful it is absolutely necessary that one should have a clearly defined and worthwhile target. It is this consciousness of purpose which distinguishes man from animals, and in the absence of which there would be no way of separating man from animals. Full awareness of this adds new dimensions to life and avoids wastage of time in trivialities.

16 September 1986

Five Seconds to Go

Once when I was on a visit to Meerut a few years ago, I went for a stroll one evening with my host, Maulana Shakeel Ahmed Qasmi. We were walking along the Sadar Bazaar, when, all of a sudden, the whole front of a house just a few yards ahead of us, collapsed without warning, blocking the entire width of the street with debris. We were hardly five seconds away from the scene of this tragic accident. Had we been five seconds earlier, or had the house caved in five seconds later, there is no way that we could have escaped. Our deaths would have been instantaneous. While we happily imagined that our final destination lay far ahead, our journey would have been cut short in the middle.

It occurred to me at that time that man is separated from death by a mere five seconds. At any point in time there is the chance that man will make this five-second journey – and find himself in another world.

If only man could quite finally grasp the enormity of the fact that the distance between him, at any given point in his life, and death, could be so infinitesimally short, he would undergo the most amazing metamorphosis; he would continue to live in this world, but his thoughts would then become firmly focussed on the life to come. If man could appreciate that he is standing on death's doorstep, he would then leave the strongest of incentives to lead an upright life, for he should then have to come to grips with the fact that, immediately after death, he would, in the words of the Prophet, either enter the garden of paradise or plunge into the pit of fire. Each step that man takes in this world leads him relentlessly onwards towards one of the two extremes. But man has become so insensitive to this reality that he seldom sees fit to give it any serious consideration.

People put their trust in false ideals, and worship them as if they were holy, but in the life hereafter, only the humble reverence man has had for God in this life can be of any avail in his final salvation. True worship means fearing God in such a manner that he comes to dominate one's thoughts entirely. He becomes the supreme force in, and monitor of all one's affairs. Whatever is done then is for the sake of God, for the love of God, out of fear of God, and for no other. In short, one's total concern is for life in the world to come. Given such concern, life's mundane affairs should pale into insignificance.

17 September 1986

Patience: A positive action

Generally, people think of patience as a negative type of passivity, but it is not. Patience is a positive attitude. In fact, it is the very foundation of all positive actions. Without patience, one cannot achieve anything worthwhile in life. Towards the end of his life, the Prophet Mohammad sent out letters, inviting kings and chieftains who ruled in and around Arabia to accept Islam. Clearly this was a positive action on the part of the Prophet. But this could only come about when circumstances looked favourable, and for this the Prophet had to be patient. Circumstances did then develop in which it became possible for him to take this important and positive step.

It is known that these letters to chieftains and kings were sent after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. Clearly, they could have been dispatched before the treaty was signed. Why, then, did the Prophet wait until after peace had been made? The practical reason for this was that before the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, the Prophet was operating under a state of siege. Day and night, there was the threat of enemy attack, and all the attention of the Prophet and his companions was directed towards defending themselves. Under such volatile conditions, it was practically impossible for plans to be made for inviting kings and chieftains to accept Islam, and even more difficult for such plans to be implemented.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya amounted to a ten-year, no-war pact between the Muslims and their foes, and once in force, conditions became completely stable. Now the Prophet was able to make plans for calling rulers to Islam. Without any further delay, he dispatched these invitations, the texts of which are recorded in biographies of the Prophet's life.

The truth is, that no positive action is possible without patience. If one wants to invite people to accept Islam, one shall have, unilaterally, to put an end to one's quarrels with them. If one wishes to acquire a humble character, one shall have to bury one's pride. If one desires to work for the betterment of humanity, one shall have to suppress all jealousy and resentment towards others. If one seeks to be just, one shall have to put aside vindictiveness and anger. Only patience can help one to accomplish all these tasks. Without patience, there is nothing that can be achieved.

18 September 1986

Learning to Teach

Having a purpose in life makes one overlook all other considerations. One is willing to endure every hardship to achieve one's goal.

In November 1922, a thirty-four year old Spanish priest by the name of Fr. Henry Heras (1889-1956) landed in Bombay harbour. India fascinated him, and, feeling that it would be fertile ground for Christian missionary work, he decided to settle here and pursue his missionary activities.

Being a foreigner, he had to find some base from which he could operate. He decided, therefore, that he would enter the teaching profession, establish himself, and then start preaching both inside and outside the college campus. With this objective in mind, he went to meet the principal of St. Xavier's College in Bombay. After satisfying himself on the score of his testimonials, for the young priest was a historian with a degree in history from his own country, the principal asked him what branch of history he would like to teach. "Indian history," was his immediate reply. The principal then asked him what he knew about the subject. His answer was frank. "Nothing." The principal was then naturally sceptical about how he was planning to teach the subject, but the young Fr. Heras simply replied, "I shall study it." Obviously there was something in his demeanour which struck the principal as being sincere and determined, for he gave the young man what for him was going to be a very difficult appointment. Undaunted by the task ahead of him Fr. Heras took up the study of Indian history with such tremendous zeal that he not only became a competent teacher of the subject, but eventually established himself as a historian of the same class as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Dr. Surendra Nath Sen. The Heras Institute of Bombay stands today as a living memorial to Fr. Heras and his life work. Had Fr. Heras not been imbued with missionary fervour, he might have remained quite content to secure a job for himself, teach European history with which he was perfectly familiar, and receive a regular pay packet at the end of the month. But because he was so determined to place himself in a position where he could communicate with the youth of the country at close quarters, he took up the extraordinarily difficult task of learning a completely unfamiliar subject in order to teach it.

If one has a purpose in life, one will overlook all other considerations, in order to concentrate on achieving one's goal. Everything one does will be directed towards that end. Mundane profits, temporary benefits and easy living will have no attraction for one so inspired. Losses and hardship will be manfully endured if this serves to bring one closer to one's objective. There are many Muslims in the world today who say they would like to engage themselves in 'missionary work'. But are they truly ready for the selfless struggle that that work entails?

19 September 1986

Blame thyself

In his book, "*How to Win Friends and Influence People*," Dale Carnegie highlights the dangers of criticism. "... It wounds man's precious pride, hurts his sense of injustice and arouses his resentment." It is obviously no way to endear oneself to anyone. To underscore this he tells the story of a hardened criminal by the name of Crowley who, having parked his car in a no-parking area in Long Island, was approached by a policeman and asked for his license. Crowley so resented' the implication that he was in the wrong that he took out his gun and shot the policeman dead. The murderer was arrested in May 1931, a case was filed against him and the judge sentenced him to death on the electric chair. Such was his egocentricity that when he was being taken to be executed he said, "This is what I get for killing people? No, this is what I get for defending myself."

To everyone, Crowley was clearly a murderer, but out of self-love, he sought to find words which would exonerate him of the crime. But no one can gloss over murder with mere words. Rectitude is not a matter of self-righteousness, but a matter of fact.

Nevertheless, people become disaffected or even enraged on being criticized and, in his book, Carnegie has covered the whole range of reasons for this being so. The main reason is that criticism, particularly when it is true, brings one down from the high pedestal on which one has placed oneself. Man is a self-lover. He never wants to admit his mistakes. To utter the three damning words, "I am wrong" is so difficult that in the long history of mankind there have been very few cases of people who have actually brought themselves to utter them.

Social Harmony

Once, a dispute arose between two farmers, over the boundary of their fields. The dispute, which to begin with, concerned a piece of land, developed into an issue of honour. Withdrawing the respective claims, they thought, amounted to losing face. Thus the quarrel which had started on a petty issue was blown up out of all proportion, and neither party was willing to make a compromise. Things went from bad to worse. Murders were even committed on either side, and fields were cut and burnt, until eventually the matter was brought to court. The procedure was lengthy and the cases were brought to an end only when both the parties had lost everything in the process – fields, orchards, jewels and so on. To recover something of lesser value, they had lost everything.

Another farmer found himself in a similar situation. But, instead of taking immediate action, he chose to stop and give the matter very serious consideration. He consulted his friends as well, as to what steps he should take. Finally he came to the conclusion that the boundary dispute should be settled not actually at the boundary, but on some other front.

He started to think over the issue not in terms of today but in terms of yesterday. He was deeply hurt at the usurpation of a part of his farm and he felt the same sense of dishonour and material loss as the men who had opted for quick action.

How was it that his rival had the daring to infringe upon his land, he thought. A great deal of cogitation led him to the conclusion that it was his own weakness that had made his enemy bold in this matter. It was not so much a matter of a boundary as of his lowly position in society. His position being weak; he could not inspire sufficient awe in his neighbour to keep him from laying hands on his rightful property. Thinking coolly, he arrived at the conclusion that if he were able to improve his status, he would be better equipped to combat his rival in a weaponless battle.

Then his rival would not venture to appropriate his rights. So, having restrained the impulse to retaliate automatically, he began to work harder than before on his fields. The strength which would have been wasted on destroying the enemy was now utilized in constructive activities. Such positive thinking inspired in him new hope and courage. Not only did he work harder in his fields, but he started a side business as well. His newly awakened consciousness had inspired in him a new zeal to construct his life afresh and cutting down on his expenses, he put all his efforts into increasing his income. In addition, he sent all his children to school and resolved to give them the best possible education.

Like the first farmer who continued to sue his rival over a period of twenty years, this farmer too had to work for twenty years for his efforts to come to fruition. For the former, twenty years of effort had amounted to nothing but destruction, whereas, for the latter they meant a period of great achievement.

His children having received a fine education were employed in important posts. He himself had developed his farm so much that he had to buy a tractor to replace the pair of oxen which had formerly tilled his land. His resources had increased considerably. The very farmer who once had humiliated him sold all his land along with the disputed boundary area.

The one who had wanted to settle the boundary dispute at the boundary was a loser; on the other hand, the one who tried to solve the problem on other fronts not only came to possess the disputed land but the whole field belonging to his rival.

When an electric bulb or an electric fan stops working, we do not devote our efforts only to the bulb or the fan to make them work again, because we know that the reason often lies outside the bulb and the fan. Simply by carrying out repairs at the proper place, we can set matters right. For example, by replacing a fuse, we can re-light the lamp and set the fan in motion again. Human affairs too are often of this nature. But it is a pity that what one remembers in terms of material matters is often forgotten in solving social problems.

The normal practice, when a problem arises, is to attempt to solve it there and then in terms of the prevailing circumstances. But since present events so often stem from past events and sets of circumstances, it is more circumspect to seek out the root causes elsewhere.

Confrontation should be avoided at all costs and no factor which can produce positive results should be rejected or ignored. Even if such an approach seems lengthy and complicated, it is the only procedure which can lead to harmonious living in society.

This saying of Ali ibn Abi Talib has been recorded by Ibn Majah (209-273 AH.). "When God opens the way to thanksgiving He opens with it the way to further blessings. And when He opens the way to prayer, He opens the way to fulfillment as well. And when he opens the way to repentance, He also opens the way to forgiveness."

22 September 1986

Need for Flexibility

A man came into a shop, intent on buying some cloth. Choosing a suitable piece was no problem, but fixing a price was, for in Eastern countries one usually has to bargain before buying anything. This time, the bargaining was tough. Neither the shopkeeper, nor the customer, was willing to budge from his original price. Finally, after holding out adamantly for half-an-hour, it was the shopkeeper who gave in, coming right down to the customer's price, thus clinching the deal.

A friend of the shopkeeper's was in the shop at the time. After the customer had left he asked, "Why waste so much time over the price, when you were ready to give it at the customer's price all along?" "You missed the point," the shopkeeper replied. "That was my way of clinching the deal. Why, if I had agreed to the customer's price straightway, he would have thought – 'Oh, I might be able to get the cloth even cheaper somewhere else' – and gone off. Anyway, I wanted to know how far he was willing to go. When I realized that he was not willing to budge even an inch I saw that I was the one who would have to budge. So I sold him the cloth at his price."

So it is with any contest in life. Quite naturally, each party wishes to settle the matter to his own satisfaction. It is only sensible, then, for him to press his demands. But, at the same time, common sense requires him to know what his limits are, i.e. how far he can go without losing anything himself – or sending his customer away dissatisfied.

Here we have a basic principle of life. It can be put in one word – adjustment. Adjustability is the key to success in life, both for individuals and for nations.

We can define adjustability as taking into account the needs of others besides one's own. In this world, success comes the way of one who is able to see both sides of a picture, to look at matters from another's point of view as well as from his own. Those who only know what they want, and go all out to achieve it irrespective of others' needs, will find their path through life strewn with obstacles and pitfalls, and it will be little wonder if they come to grief.

The Road to Success

A twelve-year old boy came running home one evening hoping for something to eat, for he felt ravenously hungry. His mother regarded him sadly. "I have nothing to give you," she said. "There is not a thing in the house you can eat, and I have no money to buy food." Tears of despair began to fall from her eyes. Her husband was a poor man – a daily labourer – and when days passed and he could not find work, it meant that everyone went hungry. The young boy thought for a moment, then asked his mother if she didn't even have twenty-five paise. "I do", she said, "but what can you buy for a whole family with just twenty-five paise?" Her son told her not to worry and begged her to give him her last coin. Too weary and hopeless even to argue with him, she handed it over and he rushed outside with a look of determination on his face. He collected a bucket of drinking water and a glass on the way out, then bought a piece of ice from a nearby stall and cooled the water with it. Then he made straight for a cinema queue where people were standing in a line, sweating, waiting to buy their tickets. He started walking up and down the line shouting, 'Water! Cold Water!' and soon attracted the crowd's attention. People began gratefully to buy his glasses of cold water. Some kind souls even paid him more than he asked for. With part of his earnings he bought more ice, and went back and sold more glasses of cold water. He kept this up indefatigably until the queues had disappeared. By this time he had managed to earn fifteen rupees, with which he went home triumphantly to his mother.

From that time onwards he started selling something or the other every day. During the day he worked hard at school and in the evening he would go out and do his best to make money. He kept this up for ten long years. Somehow managing to study while he met the household expenses.

Now he has completed 'his education although he is employed on a monthly salary of Rs. 850/-, he is still continuing with his side business in the evening, and, owing to his hard earned money has now even been able to rebuild his house. His neighbours, friends and relatives respect him and his parents bless him.

Difficult circumstances can be used as a spur to success, but only provided that such arduous and trying periods in one's life inspire in one a new sense of determination and do not fill one with a sense of frustration. The really important thing in life is to make a proper start. When a man is willing to start his journey from the right point every step amounts to making progress. Nothing then can stop him from reaching his goal. It only takes twenty five paise to start your journey – something which is surely possible for us all. Such a journey will lead nowhere, if not to success.

24 September 1986

Fearing God with regard to the weak

After the Battle of Badr (624) seventy idolators were taken prisoner and brought to Medina. One of them was Suhayl ibn Amr. The Prophet was told of Suhayl's ferocious oratory, in which he used to give vent to his antagonism towards the Prophet. It was suggested that his teeth be broken. "God will break my teeth if I do so, even though I am His prophet," was the rejoinder of God's messenger. The captives were looked after in the Companions's homes, and the Prophet issued instructions to "care for them well" One of them, Abu Aziz by name, says that the Helper in whose house he stayed used to serve him bread morning and evening, while he himself made do with dates. When Thamamah ibn Uthal, chieftain of the Yamamah tribe, was taken prisoner, he was given fine food and milk on the Prophet's orders.

(Seerat Ibn Hisham)